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## THROSSEL HOLE PRIORY

THROSSEL HOLE PRIORY is a training monastery and retreat centre following the Sōtō Zen Buddhist tradition. The Priory is affiliated with Shasta Abbey whose Spiritual Director and Abbess is Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, O.B.C. Shasta Abbey is the Headquarters of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives of the Sōtō Zen Church, is located in Mount Shasta, California. The monks of Throssel Hole Priory are members of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives & follow the teaching of Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett.

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THE JOURNAL OF THROSSEL HOLE PRIORY is published as a service to all who are seriously interested in the practice of Buddhism. Through the Journal, members & friends of the Priory are able to share their understanding and experience of Zen training. Opinions expressed in each article are those of the author: they do not necessarily reflect the views of either the Abbot, the Editor, or Throssel Hole Priory. The Journal is published quarterly and costs £5.25 p.a.

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# The Importance of Faith in One's Buddha Nature

Rev. Master Daishin Morgan, O.B.C.

All Mahayana schools of Buddhism teach that the Buddha Nature is the foundation of existence. The Buddha Nature embraces all things; it is the Great Ocean within which all of existence arises and passes away. The Buddha Nature is to be found within ourselves since it is the root of our existence. This means Enlightenment is the source of our being, and not greed, hate, and delusion. It means we are not fundamentally evil and are not born in original sin. There is plenty of karma caused by ignorance and by clinging, but this karma arose from some fundamental mistakes about the nature of ourselves and the world; it did not arise because we are fundamentally evil. Suffering exists: the cause of suffering is ignorance and clinging. There is something beyond suffering which is Unborn, Undying, the Buddha Nature.

The basis of meditation in Zen is that by sitting still and allowing the sediment to settle the original clarity and purity of our being manifests itself. When we cease to be angry, compassion arises naturally. Compassion is one of the attributes of the Buddha Nature, and it surfaces whenever we stop stirring up the mud of anger. The significance of this is that we lack for nothing. It is not necessary to manufacture compassion—it is only necessary to stop blocking it.

There is no fundamental duality between Buddhahood and ourselves. Buddhahood is within us and manifests whenever we truly let go of the notion that we are separate beings who must maintain our separateness, even if this causes harm to others. How we regard Buddhism is therefore not a matter of philosophy or theory, but



is directly relevant to our training at the present moment. If we view Buddhahood as something which can only be attained at some distant time in the future, then our present lives will never be fulfilled. We are not fundamentally inadequate. To believe we are is wrong as it denies the fact that the Buddha Nature is the root of our being. It is also a mistake to believe we have nothing left to do. Greed, hate, and delusion exist within us and we must disentangle ourselves from these poisons to be able to see them for what they are. There is training to be done, but training is not separate from Enlightenment. It is wrong thinking to view ourselves as being in one place and Enlightenment or Nirvana as somewhere else, with the life of training as a bridge between the two. This view sets up a fundamental duality or separation between ourselves and Nirvana, or Buddhahood. The result of such a separation is that we look at ourselves and see all the work that clearly needs to be done and despair of being able to make it to Enlightenment. We develop an habitual expectation of failing to reach Enlightenment and settle for something less. Another effect of seeing the process of training in dualistic terms is that, since Enlightenment is so far away and we are caught up in delusion, then our nature is to be deluded. We begin in subtle ways to doubt the Buddha Nature within ourselves. We have a tendency to believe in our own inadequacy and doubt we can reach the heights of spiritual understanding. This doubt or inadequacy can be paradoxically comforting in a delusive kind of way. Since 'we cannot make it anyway' we have an excuse for not really trying, so inadequacy becomes a hidey-hole.

The correct view, according to Great Master Dōgen and the Zen tradition, is that there is a fundamental unity between training and Enlightenment. The Buddha Nature is one and undivided. We are already one with Enlightenment, but have obscured our Buddhahood by our involvement with greed, hate, and delusion. By having faith in our Buddha Nature, we can face the darkest part of ourselves and know that it can never overwhelm us. Once we do face our worst fears and confront what

seems evil, then we discover its source is grief and pain arising from separation from the Buddha Nature. The apparent evil is not evil at all, but a search for love, a search for the Buddha Nature, but in all the wrong places. We seek pure love in others without realizing that it cannot be found by looking outwards. Some people seek solace in money or ambition—all of these things are substitutes for what our heart really yearns for which is to be one with pure love; or, in other words, our deepest yearning is for Enlightenment. Greed, hate, and delusion are thus recognized as a corrupted desire for the Buddha Nature, rather than something which is fundamentally evil and separate from the Buddha Nature. It is Buddha seeking Buddha, but for the moment a rather confused Buddha. By letting go of the cause of the confusion, Buddhahood emerges naturally.

Faith in one's Buddha Nature is therefore a key factor for without it progress is seriously impeded. This is clearly understood in Zen and there are many ways in which the trainee is given the assurance that he or she really does have the Buddha Nature and can know Enlightenment. One of the most important of these is ordination. This can be undertaken by a lay person. Lay Ordination is the taking of the Precepts and is an outward statement of one's resolve to train. It does not involve living in a monastery as monastic ordination does. It is offered to all in whatever mode of life they find themselves since ordination is the recognition that one has the capacity to train. It is an affirmation of the Buddha Nature and a welcoming into the family of the Dharma. One joins the lineage of all those who have passed on the teaching from the time of Shakyamuni Buddha down to the present in an unbroken line. By truly keeping the Precepts, one enters the great sea of Enlightenment and becomes one with the Eternal Buddha from whom Shakyamuni Buddha received the teaching. Thus, we become the ancestor of Shakyamuni Buddha. We receive the teaching and pass it on. All become Shakyamuni Buddha when they enter the great sea. Thus, all sit together within the great circle and the Body of the Buddha is complete. There is no difference between the Buddha Nature of Shakyamuni and



that of the ordinee. Lay Ordination is usually given during the week-long retreat called *The Keeping of the Ten Precepts* [J. Jukai]. On the last night of this retreat those who have received ordination (and those who have come to reaffirm it) are led up in groups to sit upon the altar. The Ordination Master and two other monks bow to the ordinees saying: *Buddha recognizes Buddha and Buddha bows to Buddha*. Then, as a sign of respect, all the monks circumambulate the congregation three times while all the temple bells are rung and conch shells blown in a joyous celebration.

Should a person feel drawn to the monastic life, they can (after a period as a postulant) take ordination as a monk. Again, this means the taking of the Precepts, the same Precepts as before, only this time they receive the robes of a monk and undertake the life of discipline within the monastery under the direction of a Master. Here, too, there is the essential ingredient of recognition within the ceremony. As the understanding and the practice of the trainee deepen, he or she goes on to receive the Transmission and perhaps in time becomes a Master and passes on the Precepts in their turn. Within all of this, no distinction is made between men and women so that the Buddha Nature of each is equally recognized. Constantly throughout the life of training the assurance is given that we have the capacity to know Enlightenment.

Having faith in one's Buddha Nature comes down to doing Zazen and not acting on doubt. Faith is naturally part of us and not something we manufacture. We must see the doubts for what they are and let them go. When I see myself caught up in delusion yet again a tendency to despair arises which must not be indulged. I must simply remain still in Zazen without joining the despair. When this is done, the delusion and doubts do not overwhelm. Such action is an affirmation of belief in our fundamental Buddhahood. We must not be afraid to go beyond the self and become Buddha. We all too easily believe that Buddhahood is something for others, visualizing it as something natural to ancient orientals but



not to ourselves. Such thinking prevents us from receiving the Buddha's Transmission and knowing the freedom and immaculacy which are our birthright.

Since the Buddha Nature is the foundation of existence, it follows that It embraces all beings without exception. To become Buddha it is necessary to act like a Buddha. It is not enough to see that the root of existence is Compassion, Love, and Wisdom: we have to become the living expression of that Compassion, Love, and Wisdom. The characteristics of the Eternal Buddha are an infinite patience, limitless compassion, and an all-embracing wisdom. There is no judgement or condemnation, just loving acceptance. There is also no discrimination. The Buddhas do not view one as adequate and another as inadequate—the teaching is offered to all. Whether we accept it or not is our choice.

The point of this is that unless we become one with the characteristics of Buddhahood we will never realize the Buddhahood latent within us. If we act in ways that discriminate against others we are acting against the nature of Buddhahood. In this country today there are those who discriminate against women by declining to fully ordain them to the Sangha. I received a letter recently from a congregation member who was told by a person she respected that women cannot become Buddha, they must first be reborn as men. This is a view that occurs in the Theravada tradition; it is not merely wrong, but harmful, as it can cause women to doubt their Buddha Nature; it can also cause men to continue to see women as spiritually inferior. This wrong view generates a climate in which a fundamental doubt is fostered, instead of faith and certainty being nurtured. There are many reasons given why ordination is denied to women in Theravada Buddhism: wrong conclusions drawn from the Pali scriptures are used as justification; the fact that the interpretation of the rules of conduct (Vinaya) as applied to women has been lost and the Order of female monks (Bhikkunis) has died out in that tradition is also given as a reason. None of these reasons are barriers to offering ordination in this country—but

the understanding of the need for it and the will to do it are necessary. I was shocked to hear it said that because women can receive all but one of the Precepts in the Theravada, and can live the homeless life as a postulant, there is no need for them to be ordained. What is being said here is that women are denied the assurance of their complete spiritual adequacy, and that denial is somehow justified. If they do not need it, why is it given freely to men? Why is there discrimination on the grounds of sex alone? Why not refuse to ordain people with blue eyes? After all, the Buddha did not have blue eyes. If Buddhahood depends upon physical characteristics, then it is not real Buddhahood. Through having been told for centuries that they were spiritually second-class, it is hard for women to believe in their natural adequacy. As long as an equivocal attitude persists, the doubt will continue to be spread. I want to make it clear, however, that nobody is *prevented* from becoming Buddha just because others do not give their complete recognition. Buddhahood does not depend upon others. However, we should do all we can to help each other.

The background to this question has been discussed fully in the pamphlet *Women and Buddhism* available from the Priory bookshop so I do not want to devote any more space to it here.<sup>1</sup> I do want to make it very clear, however, that women *can* become Buddha: they do have the Buddha Nature and no distinction should be made within the Buddhist community between men and women. It is a mistake to divide the Body of the Buddha and to cause doubt. Buddhahood is beyond the opposites of male and female.

Buddhism is becoming established in this country and we have the opportunity to take advantage of the developments that have taken place in society since the time of the Buddha. In every country where Buddhism has taken root, there has been considerable pressure to give a secondary place to women due to the prevalent attitudes of those societies. This has happened even though it went against the teaching. We now have the opportunity



to correct this mistake. Let us not continue it.

Great Master Dōgen made his view of the matter clear when he wrote in the *Shōbōgenzō*:

What makes you noble just because you are a man? After all, universal emptiness is universal emptiness, the four elements are the four elements, and the five skandhas are the five skandhas; women are the same—attaining the Way can be accomplished by both men and women. Moreover, we must equally respect both attainments of the Dharma. Do not be concerned with the differences between men and women. This is a basic principle of the supreme and wonderful Buddhist Way....

....Anyone who practices and attains the Buddhist Dharma, even a girl of seven, will be the leader and compassionate father of all monks, nuns, lay people and sentient beings. In the *Lotus Sutra* the daughter of a Dragon King became Buddha. She should be venerated, honoured, and respected like all the Buddhas and Tathagatas. This is the ancient practice of the Buddhist Way. Those who do not know this and lack the right transmission are to be greatly pitied.

Written on one bright day in March 1240, at Kannondōri-Kōshōhōrinji.<sup>2</sup>

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#### Notes

1. *Women and Buddhism* (Shasta Abbey Press, 1981) £2.30.
2. Great Master Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō* [*The Eye and Treasury of the True Law*], trans. Kōsen Nishiyama & John Stevens et. al., 4 vols (Tokyo: Nakayama Shōbō, 1975-83) Vol. 2, p. 162.

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AVALOKITESVARA  
BODHISATTVA



# Avalokitesvara

Rev. Master Kōten Benson, O.B.C.

(The following article first appeared in the *Journal of Shasta Abbey*, November-December 1982, and we are grateful for permission to reprint it here.)

Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva [*J. Kanzeon*] is the True Activity of the Great Compassionate Heart of the Cosmic Buddha as It manifests Itself in samsara. He/She/It is known by many names: The Lord who looks down in Compassion, She Who Hears the Cries of the World, the Merciful Lord, the White-Robed One, Bearer of the Lotus, Mother of Infinite Space, She of the Buddha-Eye, Saviouress, Mother of the Water of the Spirit. Sometimes as a Compassionate Mother, sometimes as a strong Father, male or female as need calls, the True Nature of Avalokitesvara transcends all opposites. Avalokitesvara is purity itself and gives birth to the True Child of the Lord. This is what we strive to emulate ('...*may I enter into the heart of the Noble, Adored Kanzeon!*') and know for ourselves—the Infinite Compassion of the Dharmakaya.

Avalokitesvara appears in infinite forms holding a multitude of objects which are the 'wise ways of helping beings' of the Cosmic Buddha, in which those who do true training can participate by doing Zazen and by taking Refuge in the Eternal. When we try to help from our selves, the suffering of the world overwhelms us and we are left in exhaustion and despair. When we strain ourselves as deeply as we can and take refuge first, before trying to help, we are able to do true good and then go on without worry. This is how to rescue both self and others. If we seek to do good for others without deeply training ourselves, we create karma for all and perpetuate the very suffering we are trying

to end.

The Infinite Compassion and Activity of Kanzeon is often not obvious and fulfils itself in hidden ways, no witness to applaud and make it known. The Turning of the Wheel of the Law within a heart is not always spectacular, but its effects go very deep and are not erased by time. Many are those who truly take Refuge when on the point of death and many an act of True Compassion is done in secret and in silence. Very often the work of Avalokitesvara is deep inside (*'Do, do the work within my heart.'*) where even the heart being touched is often unaware of the touching at that moment. Avalokitesvara will never insist nor force, but will *always* respond to any cry no matter how faint or far away.

Sometimes Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva has one thousand arms, each hand with an eye in the centre of it. This is the *all hands and eyes*,<sup>1</sup> the Total Compassionate Activity of the Dharmakaya. The many heads are the various forms, peaceful and wrathful, in which True Compassion appears and shows that the All-Sided One is not limited by space and time but appears in all forms and in all directions.

He/She/It often holds the Rosary of the Bodhisattva Vows—the beads of limitless beings to rescue, limitless passions to extinguish, limitless teaching to master, limitless training to undergo:

O Buddha, going, going, going on  
Beyond and always going on beyond,  
Always BECOMING Buddha. Hail! Hail! Hail!-<sup>2</sup>

One of the names of Avalokitesvara is Lotus Bearer and this is the flower of our openness to the Lord. It is the Lotus Womb of the Tathagata which we must become and enter in order to know the Fullness of the Dharmakaya. This is the stillness of Zazen. *'Thou hast a weapon within Thine hand, hail!'* This sword is the rising of the spirit to greet the Lord, to penetrate the Womb; the willingness to Rise and Come whenever the Lord calls. The Lotus and the Sword are the stillness and



activity of True Training through which we 'go in and out' with the Lord.

Another attribute of Avalokitesvara is the Jewel which she holds carefully and respectfully between her hands. This is the certainty that the Eternal is, without doubt. This is the certainty of our own Buddha Nature which enables us to find and dwell within the Eternal.

The Bow and Arrow are the skilful means, the wise ways of helping beings that strike the mark exactly, just right for each being and every situation. Only the Eternal can shoot the arrow and we can help in this by doing pure Zazen and the very best we can.

From the vessel of Eternal Life, Avalokitesvara is sometimes seen as pouring out the Waters of Compassion for all sentient beings.

The hands of Avalokitesvara hold the Wheel of the Dharma, the turning of which is the true appearance of Avalokitesvara.

The head of Avalokitesvara is crowned with the figure of the rising Buddha Nature for the True Nature of Avalokitesvara is the True Nature of the Eternal and the True Nature of all beings.

Avalokitesvara appears at all stages of training and is not limited by any form, place, or situation. We are not always aware when we are, in fact, manifesting Avalokitesvara to others, and others are not always aware when they are manifesting Avalokitesvara to us. Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, like the Wheel of the Dharma, *'rolls constantly and lacks for nothing yet needs something.'* It needs our stillness and willingness—our training.

The way to Avalokitesvara lies in Perfect Faith in the Infinite Compassion of the Cosmic Buddha. This compassion does not discriminate—all are within It, absolutely nothing, including ourselves, is outside It.

It asks only that we do the very best we can—no more and no less. One person's best is not the same as another's, and when we come to stand before the Lord we will be surprised to see that there is, in that place, no judgement, blame, or praise: only 'Come, my beloved. The Infinite Compassion does not see the dust and dirt but only Itself in us and we cannot know this until we try to clean up the dust and dirt as best we can. Be assured that the Lord of the House sees the intention of the Heart and not the mistakes we make in trying our best. For there will always be mistakes and there is Perfection in the midst of our imperfections. This is the Infinite Compassion of the Lord—Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva.<sup>3</sup>

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#### Notes

1. See Great Master Dōgen, 'Kannon,' in *Shōbōgenzō*, Vol. 1, pp. 64-7.
2. 'The Scripture of Great Wisdom,' trans. Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett, *Zen is Eternal Life* (Emeryville CA: Dharma Pub., 1976), p. 278.
3. For a full and informative discussion of Avalokitesvara [J. Kanzeon, C. Kuan Yin] see John Blofeld, *Bodhisattva of Compassion; the Mystical Tradition of Kuan Yin* (Boston: Shambala Pubs. Inc., 1978). The Priory bookshop has been trying to find a U.K. supplier for this work, as yet without success; when and if this book becomes available through the bookshop, we will let people know.)

(The drawing on p. 10 is by Rev. Master Mokugen Kublicki)

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# The Mandala

Rev. Teacher Chūshin Passmore, O.B.C.

....Nothing is born, nothing dies. We shape our fears from emptiness and unto emptiness they must return. The only seemingly *real emptiness* is fear; the Lord enfolds emptiness and is not empty nor is not not empty...<sup>1</sup>

Within the shining mandala our true life unfolds and all things are revealed in the radiance of the Eternal Buddha. The mandala expresses the innermost yearning of the heart; the longing of all creatures to know complete peace and freedom from want; the longing to live from moment to moment with a quiet and compassionate mind generous towards all beings. The mandala is the *all is one and all is different*; it shows us how the Eternal abides fully in every place and in every moment, and yet is not bound to space and time, never moving from the perfect centre of all existences. It can never be understood—but it can be *known* and entered into through diligent training.

All forms continually appear and fade away creating myriads of mandalas. A mandala is not confined to one particular form or shape such as a four-, eight-, or a sixteen-petalled lotus blossom; it can have an infinite number of petals. In the mind of meditation, we sit in the centre of the mandala where everything finds its own rightful place and from which all things flow; here, the purpose of one's life becomes clear and what had before seemed dull, confused, or arid is given deep meaning as we purify our present existence and allow the pattern of the eternal mandala to shape our very being. *All activity is permeated with pure Zazen*. Even in the dark waters where its seed is planted and hidden, the lotus still turns towards the light—this urge towards the light dwells in all beings and can never be extinguished.

The seed of Bodhi, of Enlightenment, emanates from the Eternal Buddha and constantly reaches out to the Eternal Buddha. However, the seed lies dormant ('alive but not growing') until it is germinated by our willingness to train; only then does the stem begin to rise and pierce the dark waters and the lotus bud appear. And yet the seed itself contains all of Enlightenment. The turning of the lotus flower towards the light is the Turning of the Wheel of the Law, the Dharmachakra, and the natural activity of the mandala: it is the heart and soul of the Buddhist Way.

...the true lotus flower is eternal truth. Even if our body and mind are not in harmony, we cannot escape the law of the true lotus flower. Seeing things just as they are is the most wondrous treasure. It is like seeing a brilliant light or being in a *Zendō*. It is the vast, eternal life of the Buddha.<sup>2</sup>

In *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*,<sup>3</sup> the mandala appears in the great waveless sea: absolute stillness surrounds and permeates it. At its centre is the *haiseki*, the mat the celebrant stands upon facing the altar during ceremonies (the *haiseki* itself forms a mandala with one of the Four Guardian Kings at each corner and a Buddha in the middle). Nine towers encircle the *haiseki*, a monk meditating upon each tower. Each monk becomes in turn the centre of a mandala for whenever we truly meditate the eternal mandala appears, even though we may not see it clearly yet. At the very centre of the *haiseki* sits a lotus bud. If you study this carefully, you will realize that morning service is an immensely powerful and moving ceremony. Through the faith and sincerity of the celebrant the eternal mandala manifests itself; through the faith and sincerity of all those present the eternal mandala manifests itself. By our determined efforts in training we come to meet the Buddhas and Ancestors. Everyday life may seem far removed from mandalas and lotus blossoms, plagued as it all too often is by worry, grief and nameless fears. But if we persevere in training,



patience and compassion will surely transform us from within and the eternal mandala will always be with us...

Within the shining mandala  
I pray and silently await His call.  
The black winds of evil karma  
blow long and hard  
and suddenly seize my timid heart;  
but silently and patiently  
I await His call,  
and prepare a warm and gentle place  
where He can pause and forever rest.  
Within the shining mandala  
—which moves and circles endlessly,  
unfolding all things within its  
fathomless ocean of treasures—  
brave monks turn to lift up one  
who has roughly stumbled;  
their eyes are clear and kind,  
seeing no blemish upon him,  
and no sin within his heart.  
Slowly, he raises his head and looks up,  
and at once the vast deep light  
pierces the raging clouds.

The mandala, the bright Life of Buddha,  
the monastery itself,  
blesses and supports each one of us.

Within its loving embrace,  
I take      Refuge in the Buddha  
              Refuge in the Dharma  
              Refuge in the Sangha.

*Bodhisattvas of great virtue!*  
*Be pleased to be my friends!*

#### Notes

1. Rev. Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett, *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* (Mount Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1977), p. 182.
2. Great Master, *Shōbōgenzō*, Vol. 4, p. 118.
3. *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, p.63.

## WESAK 1986

The wonderful udumbara flower bloomed upon this day and the meaning of this festival is found within its blossom; even as its sweet fragrance fills the whole world so does Buddhism cover the world....

More than a hundred people from all over the country gathered together at the Dame Elizabeth Hall in Birmingham to celebrate Wesak on May 10. Ten monks from the Priory joined the congregation for this most important Buddhist festival. The first part of the morning was spent meeting each other, and then, while the children were busy making paper lotus blossoms, Rev. Master Dai-shin gave a Dharma talk on the Wesak ceremony and its profound meaning. The gifts of food which everyone had brought were then shared out at lunchtime; it was very moving to hear so many voices reciting the Five Thoughts together.







After a break outside in the gardens, and a run down to the park with the children, everyone assembled for the ceremony. A beautiful altar had been set up, carefully decorated with many silk flowers and a central pagoda (the Storehouse of the Dharma) covering the Baby Buddha statue. This stood in a pool of water with a gently flowing fountain—the Water of the Spirit—pouring over His head. The children were all blessed and asperged and then processed to the altar and placed upon it their offerings of many-coloured lotus flowers which they had made. The *Scripture of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva* was chanted and three Wesak hymns sung as everyone joined in a long dragonning procession that twisted and turned around the hall; as each person came to the altar, they ladled the pure water over the Baby Buddha's head. Later in the afternoon, naming ceremonies were celebrated for Sarah Edith Richards, Aidan Alexander Head, Helen Vaughan Ellis and Louise Martene. It was altogether a beautiful and moving occasion.

The Wesak celebration gave the congregation the ideal opportunity to be hosts to the monks and to express their deep gratitude for the teaching that is always being given. This was extended by inviting people to participate in the tradition of making individual offerings to monks to cover their basic needs. The teaching of giving and receiving flowed very naturally through this act.

Many of those present appreciated the value of sharing the day with family and friends who are not practising Buddhists. It gave people who do not follow our way of practice a chance to meet the Sangha and join in, and experience a little of the spirit of training.

But the predominant feeling of the day was one of joy with so many trainees meeting, relaxing and celebrating together. A joy also to bring the sharing and intimacy of training together into a new context outside of the retreat setting. We hope there will be many other occasion such as this in the future.

....We, the followers of our Great Master Shakyamuni, bow in gratitude to Him for His goodness and compassion as we celebrate His birthday. We pray that His halo, which is the Light of the Dharma, will illuminate the darkness of the delusion of those beings of this world who have not yet heard His name. We pray that all beings may be saved and thus prosper for all eternity. We pray that the seed of Buddhahood will bud and blossom into the Flower of Enlightenment so that its beauty may fill the universe.

*Wesak Offertory.*

*(We are grateful to Jenny Bryceson from the Lancaster Meditation Group who sent us this report.)*

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# Wearing the Wagesa

Mike Lara, Lay Minister, O.B.C.

[This article was first published in the *Berkeley Buddhist Priory Journal*, Summer-Fall, 1985.]

When a lay person decides to train seriously in Buddhism, there is a ceremony he or she partakes in which celebrates that commitment. It is called *Jukai Tokudō*—Layman's Ordination. This ceremony is one of several held during *The Keeping of the Ten Precepts Retreat (Jukai)*, a week when one makes a deep resolve to look unflinchingly at oneself and then, using the Buddhist Precepts as our guide, doing something about what we find.

The ordination ceremony includes the receiving of a black *wagesa*—'circular kesa'—which is an abbreviated form of the Buddhist priest's robe (*kesa*), simplified from the *rakhusu* which is also worn around the neck.



Kesa



Rakhusu



Wagesa

When the *wagesa* is received from the Ordination Master, the following verse is recited:



How great and wondrous are the clothes of  
enlightenment,  
Formless yet embracing every treasure;  
I wish to unfold the Buddha's teaching  
That I may help all living things.

At the monastery, wearing the wāgesa is quite natural and is an integral part of daily training. However, when we return to the everyday world of family life and work, the wearing of the wāgesa can seem to become a distraction both to ourselves and others. And so we may begin to wonder when is the best time for wearing the wāgesa and how we can use it to further our training.

Because spiritual practice in the world can sometimes feel like swimming against a strong current of old habits and external influences, it is helpful to use reminders, or buoys, to keep us from getting completely swept away. The details of how to do this are not always the same for everyone, but one of the important ways I found for grounding myself is putting on the wāgesa. When we make the effort, ideally every day, to put on the yoke of training, we are reaffirming our vow that for this day we will do our best to be mindful in all our activities and dealings with others. This does not mean we pick and choose on which day we will train, but that we focus our effort on the day in front of us without guilt about our past failings or dreams about the future. We put on our wāgesa every day because we can never take our training for granted; one cannot assume that yesterday's efforts will carry us through today. We must be willing to continually renew our commitment to purify our hearts if we are to do more than just float on the current of our karmic stream. A scene from the movie *The African Queen* makes this point rather well. Katherine Hepburn and Humphrey Bogart are going down a river in Africa during World War II. At one point she asks Bogart: Since we are going downstream, why don't you turn off the boat's engine? To which he replied: Because, sweetheart, you have to go faster than the current to

control the boat! So we too must keep our training turned on if we are to gain control over our lives.

In this connection, the importance of incorporating the wagesa into our religious practice should not be underestimated. At first we use it as a reminder of our new direction; we may start by wearing it when meditating at home, at a priory or meditation group. Later, we may wish to wear it during other times of the day, particularly when relaxing around the house. I found that when I began wearing my wagesa at social functions at work it was a distraction to others and, as a result, it didn't feel right wearing it at these times. However, when I realized I could place it under my shirt and have it go unnoticed, I started doing that. Nevertheless, I tried to use it as I would normally; for example, remembering to put it over my back when eating or going to the bathroom. Most often it went unnoticed. Sometimes people would comment or ask me about its meaning. Simple answers seemed to suffice, although they explained little: I'm a Buddhist, It's part of my religious practice, etc.

Should you sense that people will not understand, then you do what is best even if under ideal conditions you would do it differently; be 'single-minded yet practical.' Over time your practice will quite naturally reveal the most useful and unobtrusive way to wear the wagesa. And you can expect this, too, to change. In addition, you may find your practice incorporating other useful reminders throughout the day, such as using the rosary, various mudras including the gasshō, chanting the Three Homages, etc. We do this in a way that is unassuming and respectful of those around us, yet never at the expense of doing the best we can whatever the situation.

I am presently wearing the Lay Minister's rakhusu and the 108-bead rosary in much the same way that I wore the wagesa. The form changes, but the intent remains the same—to manifest in myriad ways our vow to unfold the Buddha's teaching so that we may help

ourselves and all other living things.

\* \* \* \*



Fr Conrad Pepler, O.P., and Rev. Master Daishin.



## Letters from Our Readers

(The following letters are printed here with the kind permission of the writers. We hope that the questions asked and the replies will help those of you who may be having similar difficulties.)

Dear Rev. ———

Please can you help me? This is the first time I've written asking for help since I started serious Zen practice, beginning with a retreat earlier this year. The basis of my problem—if 'problem' it is—has much to do with the article *The Merit of First Mind* in the recent edition of the Journal. In particular, the trouble with the delusion of pride and a false sense of certainty.

Through the limitless compassion of the Buddha, I have been able to establish a regular and concerted meditation schedule throughout the terms here at university. Every now and then I suffer a mild but surmountable despondency, with my heart telling me to ignore surface emotions.

Just recently, after a term-break of a less formally concerted meditation practice, I suffered another but more severe despondency—disturbing distractions during Zazen and a gnawing 'what the heck' feeling. Recalling the promise made daily in the recitation of *The Scripture of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva* which says 'to calls from every quarter He responds,' I asked for help.

This came almost immediately with the redoubling of my efforts in training and also with a 'warmness' I felt in a number of very still Zazen periods. Help indeed. But now the disturbances are even greater and come thick and fast. My heart in meditation says, 'Go on.' I trust

in the Lord of the House, but can you assure me that this is not another illusion; a false sense of pride; a false sense of certainty that the housebuilder of the house of ego is using to lure me into what the Journal article calls 'second mind.'?

I trust in the Lord of the House. Only I fear that being apart from the Sangha for so long has made my ego stronger than it should be, that I am taking credit for things happening to me instead of seeing it as the work of the Buddha.

This being the first time, not only of asking for help from my seniors, but of ruminating on the problem myself, I sense that I know the answer to be just 'Go on.' But, at the risk of feeding and compounding my delusions, I await your advice.

Thank you,

Yours in the Dharma,

*Rev. Teacher Chūshin's reply follows:*

Dear——

Thank you for your recent letter; please forgive me for not replying sooner. A positive response to Journal articles is always encouraging and I am most grateful to you for writing. To be open enough to ask for advice or help is one of the most direct ways we have of sharing our experience of training with others. It can also do much to help us with feelings of isolation and inadequacy which everyone comes up against at some time or other.

As I suspect you already know, the answer to your question (it's not a 'problem'!) lies in your own letter. Several times you say 'I trust in the Lord of the House' and, equally important, you say 'just go on.' Both these teachings are necessary and, in essence, express the whole of the Buddha's teaching. Faith in the Eternal Buddha is the very foundation and lifeblood of

training; the courage and willingness to go on when discouragement and darkness come upon us, ('....the black winds of evil karma') is to choose to act on that faith and propel ourselves ever closer to the heart of Buddha. So 'just go on' and keep on asking for help whenever the need arises.

To have the humility and trust to write such a letter is the opposite of 'second mind.' Second mind is hard, opinionated and, above all, too proud to move. Learn to trust your own Buddha Nature more deeply and you will be able to sit perfectly still in the midst of every kind of karmic disturbance. You are definitely on the right track. All you need do is keep up your daily meditation; study and follow the Buddhist Precepts very carefully; and learn to preserve a gentle mind in all that you do. What more is asked of us? I wish you every success in your training and look forward to seeing you again.

In gasshō,

\* \* \* \* \*

*(The next letter is representative of several received every year. It focuses on a difficulty which many people coming to Buddhist training from a Christian or Jewish background find hard to resolve. Rev. Teacher Saidō's reply deals with the topic in great detail and should clear up many misconceptions about what Buddhism actually is.)*

Dear Rev. \_\_\_\_\_

I attended an introductory retreat last October and have continued my meditation. I also attend the Nottingham Meditation Group every Wednesday. However, I am experiencing great negativity as regards the 'religious' ceremonies which is compounded, in my view, by certain ambiguities concerning the Eternal or Lord of the House. Could you clarify for me how the Eternal, Tao, or what-



ever one wants to call it, is regarded by the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives?

I am concerned that the Eternal is referred to as 'He' and 'Him' and the Lord of the House is often shortened to 'the Lord.' I feel there is a great danger of an attitude of there being a God becoming instilled in the minds of followers of your Order.

I have talked this over with one of our group and re-read *Zen Training*; but I would welcome and be grateful for any counselling you can give.

Yours faithfully,

*Rev. Teacher Saidō's letter follows:*

Dear ———

Thank you for the questions you raised in your letter. In Buddhism, there is no belief in a separate Creator-God who sits in judgement and punishes or rewards beings of his creation who are subservient and, therefore, fearful of him. What the Buddha teaches is that there is an *Unborn, Uncreated, Undying, Unchanging*. This has been stated in a negative or 'negating' way as *Un-born, Un-created* so that there is nothing to grasp on to. However, this is open to misunderstanding as it can imply there is only void, empty blankness, and therefore no point to training. This leads to despair. So positive-sounding words have been used such as the Eternal, Cosmic Buddha, Dharmakaya, Lord of the House.... However, these can also cause misunderstanding as words are by their very nature dualistic and limiting. By using these words, one can give the impression of 'some-thing' that is graspable with the intellect and is mistaken for a God. So, if one says nothing, or uses negative terms, one can be misunderstood; and if one says something by writing articles and using positive terms, one can be misunderstood. So there is no way out of this dilemma; we just have to do

the best we can and take the consequences for it.

My Master teaches that the Eternal *is*; that It is beyond all opposites and that It is the fullest emptiness one can ever know. 'You are not the Eternal and there is nothing in you that is not of the Eternal.' This can only be known by direct experience and words are used to point the way to this. The purpose of keeping the Precepts in daily life and doing meditation is to reveal the Eternal so you know for yourself that the Eternal *is*. Ceremonies are multi-dimensional ways of demonstrating and finding this reality. For example, by being willing to perform the physical action of bowing, one can activate what bowing is within oneself and eventually know True Bowing. You understand bowing more deeply by doing it, rather than by reading about, or just seeing it.

Buddhism is a religion as it is based on faith. It is an act of faith to sit and do Zazen as one cannot grasp at it in any intellectual way. You sit there not knowing, in faith, believing that by doing this you can realize Enlightenment. The religious ceremony of doing Zazen is just the same as the religious ceremony of going to the bathroom, the religious ceremony of driving the car, the religious ceremony of reciting the *Rules of Meditation*, the religious ceremony of daily life. If you truly enter the way of training and meditation, you step into the realm of faith, and therefore religion—this needs great courage as much has to be taken on trust. Because the Eternal is stated in terms of *Unformed, Un-created* (that is, by what It is not) there is nothing you are required to believe in in order to practise Buddhism. You are not forced to believe this because I have written it. Just put it to one side without rejecting it outright in the sense of: I've not proved this true for me yet, maybe it's true, maybe it's not. But you need to keep an open mind.

Finally, here is a quote from the inside front cover of the *Journal of Shasta Abbey* as others have asked the same question about the use of 'He' and 'Him.'

Rev. Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett, Shasta Abbey, and the Editor are not responsible for the individual opinions of writers in these pages. We would, however, like to clarify our use of the word 'He' when referring to the Cosmic Buddha, the Eternal, the Dharmakaya, Kanzeon Bosatsu etc. Whenever 'He' is used, please understand that this is meant as He/She/It. We have simplified our usage in this way so that the continuity of the articles is not repeatedly broken by the awkward form of He/She/It and because we have not yet found an alternative word that conveys the complete meaning. We have felt it necessary to state this clearly in the Journal because it would seem that in the present time of equal representation of all people, some of our readers may consider the use of the word 'He' inappropriate.

I hope this has gone some way in answering your questions. Please feel free to write again for further clarification, or speak to the monk who will be leading the retreat in Nottingham in February as the questions you raise have many aspects....

Thank you again for writing.

Yours sincerely,

\* \* \*



## NEWS

*nastic Events:* On Wednesday June 18, Finin O'hEartain is ordained by Rev. Master Daishin receiving the name *Jun Alfrid* which means *Great Peace within the Dharma Cloud*. We congratulate Rev. Alfrid and hope his practice continues to prosper and produces excellent results. There are now thirteen monks training at Throssel Hole Priory.)

*Work in Progress:* Although the building is completed and being fully used, there is still much finishing work left to do. For example, two side shrines (one dedicated to *Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva* [J. *Kanzeon*] and the other to *Acalanatha* [J. *Fudō*] on either side of the main altar are currently being constructed; the large frieze above the altar is being decorated with an impressive 'garuda birds' design; and other detailed finishing jobs are under way to finally complete the Ceremony Hall.

Outside, a large and essential drainage system for carrying away water from the roof gutters has been dug and laid; a big landscaping project in front of the new building is coming along well and, before too long, a spacious lawn and benches should appear here making life a little more comfortable for lay guests. Also, the road leading from the car park to the new building has been greatly improved with the laying down of tons of rubble and 'hoggin' (the official roadmaking term for fist-sized lumps of rock virtually impossible to shovel).

Over the last few years, we have worked hard to improve and extend the amenities at the Priory, as well as its general appearance; we hope those of you who have not visited the Priory for a while will soon do so and once again enjoy training with the resident community.

*Taped Lecture Scheme:* In an attempt to provide more help and support for our developing meditation groups a 'Tape of the Month' scheme will commence in August. There will be two specially recorded lectures on each cassette, one designed for newer group members and the other for those who have been attending for some time. As longer standing congregation members do not have the opportunity of attending regular lectures at the Priory there has been little chance up to now to go into the deeper teachings. One of the lectures each month will be designed to help fill this gap. The first series in this category will be on the Lotus Scripture and will cover the teaching of this important Mahayana scripture in some depth over the next 12 to 18 months. Those who wish to follow the series are advised to buy their own copy of *The Threefold Lotus Scripture* translated by Kat et. al., published by Weatherhill and available from the Priory at £10 post paid. The tapes will be sent out on or near the first of each month starting in August to those meditation groups who wish to receive them. We ask for a donation of £1.50 to cover the costs though larger donations will be of great help to the Priory. Those who can afford to pay an annual subscription of £18 are encouraged to do so to cut down on the work involved. The Priory has already been able to buy the necessary duplicating equipment with generous donations from a number of groups and individuals.

We hope the lecture will provide a focus for meditation group meetings where monks are unable to attend. Those who cannot go to group meetings are welcome to subscribe individually. Questions and comments arising from the lecture will be welcome—it can be hard to tell how a lecture is going over when given to a machine. Answers to questions raised that are of general interest will be recorded onto the end of the following month's cassette.

*Jukai 1986:* Thirty-two lay trainees attended *The Keeping of the Ten Precepts Retreat* [J. Jukai], March 29-April 5. Happily, the new gold-leafed Buddha statue was finished just in time and placed upon the altar in the new Ceremony Hall. As can be seen from the photos,



the statue evokes a presence and stillness which constantly reminds us of the Treasure House to be found within our own hearts.

On a clear and bright April 1, thirteen people received Lay Ordination vowing to follow and keep the Buddhist Precepts, and to train themselves endlessly: Frank Wellstead, David Richards, Iain Robinson, Christopher Sutcliffe, Brian Thompson, Graham White, Angie Pedley, Stephen Watson, Elizabeth Kingsnorth, Moira Pagan, Sue Askey, Michael Hamilton, and Anne Tomasi. We wish all these new Buddhists great success in their future practice:

Now you have thrown away the past evil and been converted to the Truth. From this time the Buddha and the truest enlightenment are your true teacher so call the Buddha your teacher and do not be converted to evil and other teaching; this is my great compassion to you.



The following evening, *The Ceremony of Contrition and Conversion* [J. Sange] took place and, on April 3, we celebrated *The Lotus Ceremony* for the first time in the Ceremony Hall. In this beautiful ceremony, we express the deepest gratitude to all the Buddhas in all directions and in all worlds; during *The Lotus Ceremony*, to manifest the Turning of the Wheel of the Law and also to show respect for the lay congregation, the community of monks slowly circumambulate the seated lay trainees—The Buddha Nature of all is recognized without exception. Fortunately, the snow showers cleared over night and we enjoyed a finer day for *The Ceremony of Following Where the Precepts*, as the *Blood of the Buddhas*, lead [J. Ketchimyaku]. As the long and winding



procession led by the Abbot twisted and turned around the monastery grounds, now fast, now slow—at times tracing the bloodline of the Ketchimyaku—the course of Buddhist training was vividly brought to life. For training never stops in one place, and often demands that we change direction, sometimes when we least want

to. But still we go on, trusting in the Eternal Buddha and the wisdom of our teachers. Later that evening, *Recognition*, the final ceremony of Jukai, brought the retreat to a joyful and fitting close:

All the Buddhas are within the one Buddha Shakyamuni, and all the Buddhas of past, present and future become Shakyamuni when they reach Buddhahood. This very mind is itself the Buddha and, should you awaken to a complete understanding thereof, your gratitude to the Buddhas will know no bounds.

*Memorials:* Memorial ceremonies have recently been held at the Priory for Mauro Nessi, Elsie Powell, John Arthur Streeter & Catherine Streeter, and Wanda Kublicka. By offering up the merit of our meditation and sincerely and wholeheartedly taking part in a memorial ceremony—not only for dead relatives and friends, but for any dead being—we truly help them in ways which only the Buddhas can fully understand.

*T.V. Programmes:* The Thames Television religious programme called 'Road to Damascus,' recorded at the Priory in February, is to be shown in the London area on July 28 at 11.30pm. The programme briefly covers some aspects of daily life at the monastery and features a short interview with Rev. Master Daishin. 'Road to Damascus' is expected to get a more general screening on Channel 4 sometime later.

On August 31, a 35-strong film crew from Tyne Tees T.V. will be invading the Priory to record another programme as part of the Sunday 'Morning Worship' series shown on ITV. The hour-long programme will consist of the *Festival Memorial for Great Master Dōgen* which will be celebrated on that day; we encourage as many of our congregation as possible to attend. Great Master Dōgen is the most illustrious Japanese Ancestor in the Sōtō Zen tradition and his memorial day is remembered with great respect and rejoicing. The programme will be broadcast on the morning of September 21 on ITV.



*Visits:* In May we were pleased to have Fr Conrad Pepper, O.P., visit us again to lecture and spend some time with us. Fr Conrad's long and deep experience of the spiritual life is evident in all that he does and we are grateful to him for sharing this experience with us. Two of the British monks still training at Shasta Abbey, Rev. Peter Bonati and Rev. Mugō White, also visited the Priory while on holiday over here. It was good to see them again and hear the latest monastic news from our founding monastery—we look forward to seeing them again soon.

*Lectures and Retreats:* From April 16-28, Rev. Master Daishin was occupied in leading the 'Southern teaching tour.' This time round the tour embraced the Buckingham, Exeter, and Southampton areas. Also, Rev. Teacher Saidō recently gave a talk to pupils at Haltwhistle Middle School; and, as the Priory's first prison chaplain, in May he spoke to young offenders at the Castington Youth Correction Centre.

*Donation:* We are grateful for the following donations: silk flowers, organ music, and Buddhist jewellery; vitamins, band-aids, work gloves, oven gloves, aprons, and an ironing board; clothing, furniture, padded envelopes & packing material; trees, plants, rose bushes, seeds & a gardening book. The kitchen was able to make good use of generous donations of fruit, chocolate, shortbread, and butter; sweets, biscuits, dried fruit, and Ribena. And Sam and Jane relished their dog and cat food.

*Begging Bowl:* The lay trainees' library requests copies of Great Master Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*, the *Lotus Sutra*, and the *Vimalakirti Sutra*; the bookshop could use plastic carrier bags and long cardboard mailing tubes (suitable for posters); the garden still needs heathers and hardy plants; an electric iron, ironing board, and office scissors would also be appreciated.

\* \* \*



# BOOKS & BUDDHIST SUPPLIES

NEW ITEMS (All prices inc. post & packing)

## ACALANATHA [J. FUDŌ] STATUE

This beautifully detailed gold-plated figure (8cm high) stands in a halo of flames and holds the sword of the Buddha's Wisdom. Acalanatha, a guardian deity, is one of the Kings of Light and represents the wrathful aspect of compassion. With shackled feet he stands in hell and has vowed to remain there until all beings realize the Truth. His shrine is usually to the left of the main altar in the Ceremony Hall. £15.00.

## KSITIGARBHA [J. JIZŌ] STATUE

In the same series as above. This gold-plated standing figure (8cm high) holds a shakyojo (a priest's staff with decorative top) in one hand and the Jewel of Enlightenment in the other. This Bodhisattva is particularly associated with children. He responds to all sincere offerings, no matter how small. £15.00.

## RED FISH BROOCH

This replica of a Chinese Ming dynasty amulet shows two fish carved in red lacquer and could be worn on clothes or as a decoration on a bag etc. In Buddhism, fish represent eternal meditation as it is said that fish never sleep. £5.00.

## ALSO AVAILABLE

## AVALOKITESVARA [J. KANZEON] STATUE

Same series as above. This gold-plated figure has a halo and stands on a lotus throne in gasshō. She is the Bodhisattva of Compassion and her shrine is to the right of the altar in the Ceremony Hall. £15.00.

The Avalokitesvara and Acalanatha statues would add exquisite detail to any home altar where they could stand on either side of the main statue.

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